



Committee of Higher Education and Employment Advancement Public Hearing

Tuesday, February 8, 2011

Testimony

by

Kevin Corcoran, Associate Executive Director,
Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium

Good morning Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Kevin Corcoran, Associate Executive Director of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC), and I am here today to support **Raised Bill PHB-5886, An Act Concerning the Increasing Access to Higher Education for Inmates.**

Today, Tuesday the 8th, marks the start second week of "closed" online course work for eight offenders within the Carl Robinson correctional facility. After just one session, offenders expressed their excitement and eagerness to return to the course. This collaborative effort between the CTDLC, Department of Correction (DOC) and the Unified School District (USD) was made possible by 2010 legislative funding. This pilot program offers inmates the ability to gain Financial Literacy skills that will be invaluable during their re-entry and help reduce the overall recidivism rate. Additionally, the Financial Literacy course [see attached] is Connecticut Adult Education approved and is worth one credit towards an Adult Credit Diploma.

While it may be premature to call this pilot project a success after just one week, there have been several successes realized along the journey. Being a collaborative organization, CTDLC successfully partnered with the USD as well as the New Haven re-entry program and Andrew Clark, Director of the Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy at Central Connecticut State University to determine the curriculum needs of the offenders. We successfully partnered with the Department of Correction to identify and address security and technology concerns in our efforts to offer online content to the offender population. Lastly, we continued to work with the USD and DOC to identify and select candidates for this pilot program as well as the on-site mentor to help the students with the technology and the online teacher who guides the offenders in their course work.

Our organization has already started discussions on how to support a larger and more diverse offender population. Funding will be critical to the continued success of this project as many of the correctional facilities currently lack the full capability of supporting online learning and the corresponding course curriculum will need to be modified to adhere to the 'closed' nature of the DOC. For that reason, CTDLC has continued discussions with Andrew Clark about federal grant dollars that may be available to extend our current offering.

As the State of Connecticut explores the needs of the inmate population, the CTDLC would like to offer its continued support in enabling learning opportunities for offenders. We have already offered to share our curriculum free of charge with a multi-agency collaboration striving to create a state-wide Financial Literacy program.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

Department of Correction Financial Literacy Course Abstract

Purpose of the Course	To train incarcerated individuals with the fundamental financial skills needed to become financially responsible and independent.
Audience Description	Incarcerated individuals with a minimum 6 th grade reading comprehension level.
Course Description	<p>The program will be offered through online, self-paced instruction and will be accessible through the Internet to computers located in the job center at the Carl Robinson Correctional Institute. The course will be facilitated through an offsite teacher. A mentor will be onsite in the classroom to offer course guidance and technical support to the students. The Financial Literacy course is based on a 1 credit adult education computer based course and focuses on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Planning • Budgets • Saving and Investments • Credit • Basics of Borrowing • Financial Services • Insurance: Your Protection • Careers • Your Rights as a Consumer • Owning Your Own Home • Filing a Tax Return
Course Length	The course will encompass 72 hours and will be offered in 2 hour sessions, 2 times per week for 18 weeks.
Course Objectives	<p>By the end of the Financial Literacy course students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate an understanding of personal financial planning and sound money management skills. • Accept responsibility for and understand personal consequences of financial decisions. • Demonstrate the value of planning, goal-setting and prioritizing. • Demonstrate the value of budgeting and saving. • Gain exposure to the critical importance of responsibly managing credit. • Explore financial institutions and the wide range of services that are offered. • See how insurance fits into a responsible plan of risk management. • Gain exposure to the financial aspects of purchasing a home.